

Congress, and to the Italian-Americans who serve on the court, beginning with the Supreme Court Justice, who has also joined us this evening.

Of course, there are millions more. The Italian-Americans who built our businesses and our farms, who are the backbone of our communities, they deserve so much of the credit for America's strength and greatness.

Many believe the remarkable story of Italians in America began with the immigration at the early part of this century. But in fact, the pattern was set long before that by an Italian named Henry de Tonti, born Enrico Tonti in Gaeta. A renowned soldier, sometime diplomat, fearless adventurer, Tonti was the most trusted deputy of the great French explorer, La Salle. You could say he was La Salle's Leon Panetta. *[Laughter]*

He had an incredible string of accomplishments. He was the first European to build a ship on our Great Lakes. He and La Salle together explored the Mississippi River. He brought settlers and traders to the great State of Illinois. And historians credit him with being the true father of that State.

This remarkable Italian came to my attention because in 1686 he founded a settlement about midway between Illinois and the Gulf of Mexico on the Mississippi River. The town became known as Arkansas Post, the very first settlement in my home State.

La Salle said that Tonti's energy and resolve made him, and I quote, "equal to anything." In their long and rich history, Italian-Americans have proved themselves equal to anything. And so the extraordinary friendship between the United States and Italy has also proved equal to anything.

The extraordinary friendship between the United States and Italy, rooted in our common love of liberty and democracy, our shared energy and resolve, will help us rise to the challenges of the 21st century and will ensure that we will always be the closest of allies, the best of friends.

And so ladies and gentlemen, let us raise a glass to the partnership between our nations, to the Italian-American community, to the President of Italy and his daughter. *Viva l'Italia*, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:37 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Proclamation 6877—National Day of Prayer, 1996

April 2, 1996

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

America's heritage is rich with expressions of faith in God. Indeed, the desire for religious freedom was one of the chief reasons that early settlers risked their lives to come to this land. Many of those who braved the long ocean journey were men and women of devout religious beliefs who sought a new home where they might worship without persecution. The authors of our Constitution recognized this history in the language of the first amendment, and through times of uncertainty, sorrow, and pain, the citizens of the United States have called upon the wisdom and mercy of the Almighty for guidance and strength.

A National Day of Prayer, first proclaimed by the Continental Congress in 1775, stems from the understanding that faith is a fundamental part of our Nation's social fabric. In an impassioned speech before the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Benjamin Franklin put the importance of prayer in perspective, proposing that "... prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business" And so it has been to this day in statehouses all over our great land.

Today we cherish the liberties the first immigrants fought so hard to obtain, and we enjoy a degree of freedom and prosperity only dreamed of 200 years ago. And though our citizens come from every nation on Earth and observe an extraordinary variety of religious faith and traditions, prayer remains at the heart of the American spirit. We face many of the same challenges as our forebears—ensuring the survival of freedom and sustaining faith in an often hostile world—and we continue to pray, as they did, for the blessings of a just and benevolent God to guide our Nation's course.

This occasion calls us to affirm our country's spiritual roots and to humbly express our gratitude to the source of our abundant good fortune. As we seek to renew the values that have long strengthened America's families and communities, let us reach out to God and to one another for wisdom and courage. We should celebrate this day in the tradition of our founders who believed that God governs in the affairs of men and women, and who based their greatest hopes, dreams, and aspirations on the surety of divine protection.

The Congress, by Public Law 100-307, has called on our citizens to reaffirm annually our dependence on Almighty God by recognizing a "National Day of Prayer."

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 2, 1996, as a National Day of Prayer. I encourage every citizen of this great Nation to pray, each in his or her own manner, seeking strength from God to face the challenges of today, requesting guidance for the uncertainties of tomorrow, and giving thanks for the rich blessings that our Nation has enjoyed throughout our history. "Do not pray for easy lives," said John F. Kennedy in 1963, "Pray to be stronger" May it be so with each of us.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this second day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twentieth.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:10 a.m., April 3, 1996]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 3, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on April 4.

Remarks to Commerce Department Employees on the Aircraft Tragedy in Croatia

April 3, 1996

Thank you, Dr. Good. Ladies and gentlemen, the Vice President and the First Lady and the members of the Cabinet and I want-

ed to come here to be with the employees of the Commerce Department at this very difficult hour. Hillary and I have just come from Ron Brown's home, visiting with Alma and Michael and their family and friends who are there. And we wanted to come and spend a few moments with you.

As all of you know, the plane carrying Secretary Brown and his delegation, including a number of your colleagues, business leaders, and members of the United States military, went down today near Dubrovnik, Croatia. We do not know for sure what happened there. But I wanted to come here today, as it is almost Passover for American Jews and I know a lot of you will want to be leaving soon, just to have the chance to say a few words to you.

The first thing I want to say is before I left I asked Alma, I said, "Alma, what do you want me to say when I go to the Commerce Department?" She said, "Tell them Ron was proud of them, that he liked them, that he believed in them, and that he fought for the Commerce Department, and tell them that you're going to do that now," which I thought was an incredible thing.

I've known Ron Brown a long time. I was always amazed at the way he was continually reaching out trying to bridge the differences between people, always trying to get the best out of people, always believing that we could do more than we have done. In a way, this job was sort of ready-made for him at this moment in history, and he loved it very much.

Most of the time, Ron Brown spent using the power of the Commerce Department to find ways to give opportunity to ordinary Americans, to generate jobs for the American economy and build better futures for American citizens. But when we met earlier this week, right before he left for the Balkans, he was so excited because he thought that, along with these business leaders and the other very able people from the Commerce Department on this mission, that they would be able to use the power of the American economy to help the peace take hold in the Balkans, to help people in that troubled place have the kind of decent, honorable, and wonderfully ordinary lives that we Americans too often take for granted. And he was so excited